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SUBJECT: CAR: BOZIZE WILL MEET CAR REBELS, ARCHBISHOP SAYS

Classified By: DCM LUCY TAMLYN, FOR REASONS 1.4(D)

11. (U) The following cable was drafted by U.S. Embassy Bangui.

12. (C) SUMMARY: The Archbishop of Bangui told Poloff on April 25 that the CAR rebel group Union of Republican Forces (UFR) and President Bozize recently agreed to meet and engage in a dialogue. Some issues remain, but the Archbishop is cautiously optimistic that the northern-based rebel group will commit to a process of peace and reconciliation. At the same time he voiced deep concerns about whether President Bozize will follow through and meet the rebels half way. In a thirteen-page manifesto that the Archbishop received on April 22, the UFR demands negotiations with President Bozize and calls on the Archbishop to mediate. The manifesto, which credits UFR Secretary General Lt. F. N,Djadder-Bedaya as its author, outlines the rebel group,s purpose and Bozize,s failure of leadership, calling him a "criminal in power." The UFR also highlights six prerequisites that must be met by the GOCAR to prove its good faith before the UFR enters into any dialogue with President Bozize. The Archbishop is concerned that the rebellion in Chad might complicate any potential peace process involving rebels in CAR. He said there was a significant element of Islamic radicalism behind the Chadian rebellion and its April 13 attack on N,Djamena, and he worries that "Sahelian Islam" will become the dominant religion in CAR, giving rise to political-religious radicalism. End summary.

13. (C) During an April 25 meeting, Archbishop of Bangui Paulin Pomodimo told Poloff that the UFR and President Bozize had agreed earlier this week to engage in peace talks. Although the date, place, and structure of the talks have not yet been determined, the Archbishop believes the rebel group is committed to establishing a dialogue, perhaps more so than President Bozize. Bozize agreed in principle to meet and hold a dialogue with the UFR only after being advised to do so by Gabonese President Bongo Ondimba on a recent trip to Libreville.

14. (C) While Bozize is a very religious man, the Archbishop said, he has not assuaged doubts that he has the vision to facilitate statesmanship, peace, and reconciliation. In addition, he said, Bozize has a kind of "diabolical pact" with certain figures in the CAR security forces who brought him to power and who regularly commit serious human rights abuses with near total impunity.

15. (C) The agreement in principle by both sides to enter into a dialogue came just a week after the Archbishop delivered a highly publicized Easter sermon calling on all sides to engage in talks and allow peace to evolve. The sermon strongly condemned killings by northern rebels and "massacres" by the FACA in Ouham-Pende prefecture in late January and mid-February, and it highlighted the resultant suffering of the civilian population. In addition, the Archbishop emphasized that if the GOCAR wanted to end the rebellion, it had to make a real effort to combat poor governance and impunity.

16. (C) In its 13-page manifesto, the UFR,s "political bureau" demands negotiations with President Bozize and calls on the Archbishop to mediate. Attributed to (but not signed by) UFR Secretary General Lt. F. N,Djadder-Bedaya and dated April 20, the manifesto states that the rebel group,s purpose is to resolve, either politically or by force, the "Central African crisis" that continues to deepen due to insecurity, injustice, dire financial straits, and grave human rights violations. It cites the UN, AU, and international and religious organizations as entities it intends to engage "diplomatically," and calls on the GOCAR to protect CAR,s human rights activists, such as Nicolas Tiangaye, the former head of the Central African Human Rights League (LCDH); Nganatouwa Goungaye Wanfiyo, the current head of the LCDH; president of the CAR journalists, union Maka Gbossokotto, and labor rights advocate Noel Ramadan. The UFR also highlights six prerequisites that must be met by the GOCAR before the UFR enters into any dialogue with President Bozize, including the payment of seven months of civil service salary arrears and three months of pension allowances and scholarships, the release of all political detainees and prisoners, a guarantee of protection for CAR,s human rights defenders, and an end to preferential rank and treatment of "the ex-rebels" in the FACA.

17. (C) The manifesto states that Bozize has been taken hostage by "the ex-rebels" who helped him take power in 2003 and who act as if they are above the law. It also cites several articles of the CAR constitution and the war crimes provisions of the Statute of Rome, provides examples of abuses committed by the Bozize government, emphasizes the marginalization of CAR students due to poor social and academic conditions, and calls on the political opposition and civil society to create a reconciliation commission and a political transition. Near the conclusion, it highlights France, the United States, and China as countries that overcame great challenges in the past to become great nations of today.

18. (C) The Archbishop is concerned that the rebellion in Chad could complicate any potential peace process that might be undertaken involving CAR rebels. He said there was significant element of Islamic radicalism behind the Chadian rebellion and its April 13 attack on N,djamena. The same radicalism was perceived in events leading up to the 2003 coup, when pro-Bozize rebels, including many Chadian combatants, attacked and destroyed churches while leaving mosques untouched. The growth in the number of Chadian imams in Bangui continues to concern the Archbishop, and the (more moderate) imams of CAR origin are also worried about this trend, he said. In addition, the Catholic Church fears that Islam, with continued support from certain Arab countries, will "conquer Green Africa" (countries such as the D.R. Congo, Angola, and CAR), just as it conquered Sahelian (northern) Africa. (NOTE: Islam is not the only threat to Catholicism perceived by the Archbishop. He also said Bozize and some members of his inner circle are Free Masons and "do not like the Catholic Church." As evidence, he cited a continued failure by the Bozize government to respect an agreement exempting the Catholic Church from having to pay customs taxes. In fact, all diplomatic missions in the country are subject to the same policy. END NOTE.).

19. (C) COMMENT: It is far too early to tell whether the agreement by the UFR and Bozize is real and whether it will

lead to dialogue; however, if the Archbishop continues to make progress as a mediator, international partners will likely be called on to add their moral support. The UFR manifesto is a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a rebel movement about which little is known. The group,s references to constitutional articles, human rights activists, and international human rights conventions suggest that N,Djadder, if not the UFR itself, is educated and organized.

¶10. (C) Although longwinded and lacking in focus, the manifesto is clear about the extent to which severe financial problems and lack of respect for human rights have contributed to the insecurity that continues to plague CAR. In addition, the manifesto,s references to the United Nations coincide with rumors that N,Djadder had plans to visit New York and request support for his cause from the UN Secretary General. It is still unclear how many other rebel

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groups there are in northern CAR, whether they work together or overlap, and whether all of them share views and goals similar to those of the UFR. While the Archbishop,s concerns about Islam might be colored by a competition for adherents between faiths, his references to the spread of radical Islam have sobering political overtones.

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